

Marlins & Platypuses

Wait around too long, and they'll get away

by Airman staff

Woulda, coulda, shoulda. Three words you don't want to say when you look back on your Air Force career — be it four, 20 or 30 years.

You've seen the lists: "Top 100 Things You Should Do Before You Die," or "Top 10 Adventures of a Lifetime." Sometimes they make sense, sometimes not.

These lists suggest you climb Mount Everest before you die, or milk a platypus before your 30th birthday — if that's even possible.

The Airman staff came up with the Top 10 things you should do while you're in the Air Force. Though not all inclusive, the list includes things that most Airmen can reasonably achieve during their time in service.

1 Get schooled

Take advantage of the training and educational programs available to you. Get a degree from the Community College of the Air Force, a bachelor's, master's or maybe even a doctorate. And don't forget that the Air Force has tuition assistance programs.

2 Fly in a jet

For some Airmen, flying in an aircraft has nothing to do with their job duties. But don't let that keep you from flying. Find out if your base has incentive programs to fly in military aircraft, or hop on a training or refueling flight.

3 Travel to distant lands

Not many companies can offer to fly their employees to locations around the world for free. With the Space A program, nearly everybody in the military can take a flight to places like England, New Zealand, Australia and Spain.

4 Be selfless

Give something of yourself to others, be it a youth baseball coach, Habitat for Humanity, Big Brothers and Big Sisters programs, base volunteer programs, etc.

5 Fulfill a dream

Catch a marlin, climb a mountain, take part in the Alaska Iditarod, swim with dolphins, whatever. No matter how crazy your dream, there's a high probability that there's an outdoor recreation office somewhere in the world that might help you realize it.

6 Show me the money

You can't stay in uniform forever, so plan to have \$10,000 in a savings account or invest in retirement savings, like the Thrift Savings Plan. Not only will this allow you to have money for emergencies or vacations, but also can help you fund any post-retirement goals.

7 Be a mentor

Mentoring is caring about your profession and sharing that knowledge and passion with others, which may rub off and convince someone to join and stay in the Air Force.

8 Don't homestead

Select assignments outside the United States. This allows you and your family to learn first-hand about different cultures and religions from around the world.

9 Just do it

There are moments in life that define a person. Don't let those moments pass you by. Volunteer to serve in Iraq or Afghanistan. If your career field restricts you from volunteering for deployments, try to take part in humanitarian missions like hurricane or tsunami relief.

10 Make your parents proud

This is an easy one. Serve your country proudly, wear your uniform with pride and practice what your parents taught you — never lie, cheat or steal and always be polite. And, of course, always eat your peas and spinach.

